



Life-saving early warning systems for droughts are focus at UN-backed meeting



9 December 2009 – With the frequency and severity of droughts likely to increase due to climate change, more than 60 scientists from all the world’s regions are meeting at a United Nations-backed conference in the United States this week to draw up guidelines for early warning systems that could save countless lives.

“Early warning systems for drought allow individuals and communities to act in sufficient time to reduce the possibility of loss of life, personal injury, and damage to property and fragile environments,” the Director of the UN World Meteorological Organization (**WMO**) Climate Prediction and Adaptation Branch, Mannava K. Sivakumar, said, stressing his agency’s key role.

“Through WMO, there is global availability of real- and near-real-time weather and climate information which is essential for early warning activities. In this regard, WMO and its 189 Member States and territories operate a unique worldwide system for collection, processing, distribution and exchange of weather information and warnings.”

The week-long workshop in Lincoln, Nebraska, coinciding with the UN summit on climate change in Copenhagen, Denmark, is organized jointly by the WMO and the US National Drought Mitigation Center (NDMC) at the University of Nebraska, and co-sponsored by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), US Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (**UNCCD**).

WMO noted that there have been several intense droughts and heat waves in recent years, such as those in Europe in 2003, south-eastern Australia in 2009, and Argentina in 2008-09, increasing concern that droughts may be increasing in frequency.

"Our ability to lessen or mitigate the impacts associated with drought is contingent on putting in place comprehensive early warning systems," the director of the School of Natural Resources of the University of Nebraska, Don Wilhite, told the opening session of the workshop yesterday.

"This requires that we develop a better understanding of the tools and data sources that are important components of these systems."

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